

## CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY





# THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600 27 March 1966

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State Dept. review completed



27 March 1966

#### HIGHLIGHTS

Buddhist and student agitation, featuring increasing anti-American overtones, continued this weekend. In a nationwide radiobroadcast, Premier Ky appealed for unity, and the government is working behind the scenes to gather support from political and religious groups. No significant contact with Viet Cong forces was reported this weekend.

- I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
  US Marines protect Saigon river ships (Para. 1).
  US Marines fend off attackers in Quang Nam Province (Para. 2). Koreans terminate successful operation in Binh Dinh Province (Para. 3). Sevenday USMC/ARVN operation ended (Para. 4). Outposts on Cambodian border continue to be attacked (Para. 5).
  B-52 Stratofortress strikes were made on 25 and 26 March (Para. 6).
- II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Weekend Buddhist agitation in I Corps and in Saigon is discussed (Paras. 1-4). Government efforts, including a speech by Premier Ky and attempts to gain acceptance of its compromise plan by leading political and religious figures prior to public announcement, are reported (Paras. 5-7). A current assessment of the situation by the US Embassy is outlined (Para. 8).

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Military Developments in North Vietnam:

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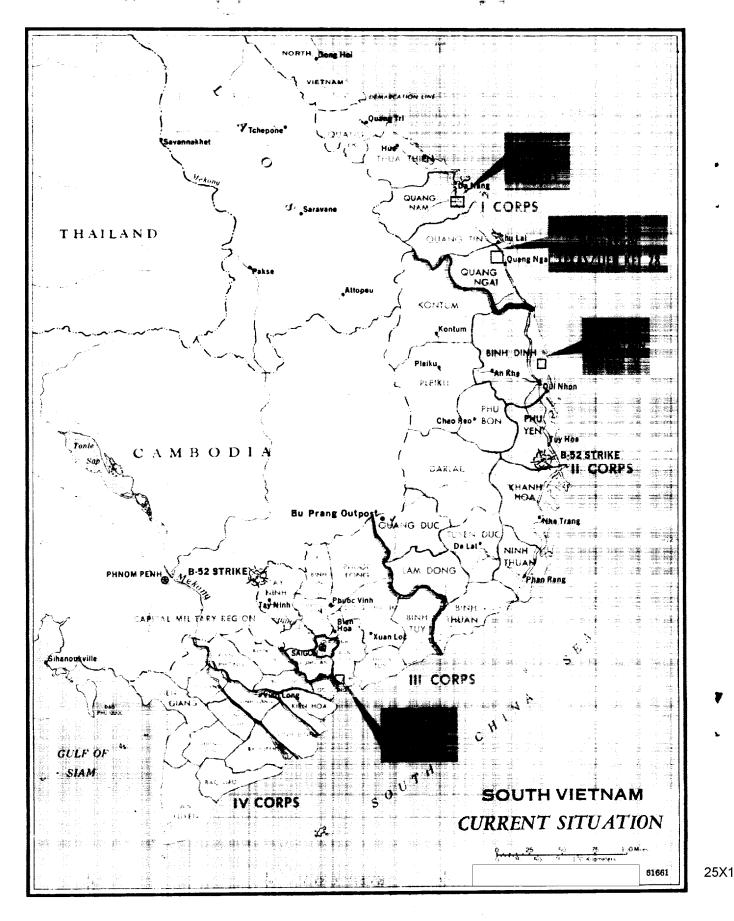
- V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi finally revealed that it was sending a high-level delegation to the 23rd CPSU Congress (Para 1).
- VI. Other Major Aspects: North Vietnam apparently plans to resume exports of apatite ore, suggesting that recent air strikes against the Lao Cairail line did not cause serious damage (Para. 1).

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### I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

- 1. On 25 March, US Marines made an amphibious and heliborne assault on the southern edge of the Long Thanh Peninsula 28 nautical miles southeast of Saigon in the swampy Rung Sat Special Zone. No significant contact is reported in the operation, JACK STAY, between the marines and their objective, the Viet Cong forces that have harassed river traffic from Vung Tau to Saigon.
- 2. In Operation KINGS in Quang Nam Province, US Marines killed 62 Viet Cong on 25 March after being attacked by an estimated two companies.
- 3. Operation TIGER V in Binh Dinh Province terminated yesterday as another success for troops of the ROK Capital Division. While suffering light casualties, the Koreans killed 324 Viet Cong (Korean body count), took 178 prisoners and a small quantity of ordnance, and detained 541 suspects. SOU BOCK, a two-battalion ROK search-and-destroy operation, was initiated yesterday in the same area.
- 4. The USMC/ARVN Operation TEXAS/LIEN KIET 28, which ended on 25 March, resulted in 473 Viet Cong killed. The marines lost 58 men killed and 168 wounded in the 7-day operation which reacted to a Viet Cong attack on an ARVN outpost ten miles southeast of Chu Lai.
- 5. ARVN claims 212 Viet Cong have been killed since the 24 March attack on Bu Prang outpost in Quang Duc Province. US advisers have confirmed 90 of the dead in the continuing ARVN reaction in which two 50-caliber machine guns and one 75-mm. recoilless rifle have been captured along with numerous small arms and recoilless rifle ammunition. An outpost not far from Bu Prang was attacked without success last night by an estimated Viet Cong battalion which withdrew into Cambodia.

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6. On 25 March, 15 B-52 Stratofortresses bombed a suspected Viet Cong reconnaissance and engineer training center one mile from the Cambodian border in Tay Ninh Province. Yesterday, a suspected Viet Cong troop concentration was the target of 15 B-52s in Phu Yen Province.

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### II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

- 1. The confrontation between Buddhist elements and the Ky government continued this weekend without any evidence of a conclusion in the near future. Public agitation featured increasing overtones of anti-American sentiment in I Corps and, for the first time, a street demonstration in Saigon. Government attempts to achieve a consensus among political and religious groups on its proposed constitutional preparatory committee—while not entirely successful thus far—have apparently made some progress. In particular, a statement this morning by Buddhist Institute chairman Tam Chau has apparently had a moderating effect upon some Buddhist students in Saigon.
- A potentially explosive issue was touched off yesterday in Hue when a US Marine tore down an anti-US, English language sign. The local "struggle committee" quickly issued an ultimatum which threatened US installations in the area if its demands were not After some discussion, an apology by the senior US military adviser in the area forestalled any immediate action by the student leaders. The struggle committee later announced the US apology over the municipal radio, broadcast an open telegram to President Johnson protesting the incident, and announced that a rally would be held at some future date to discuss the incident. Other Hue radiobroadcasts, including a critical review of US political commitments in South Vietnam since 1950 and criticisms of US Ambassador Lodge, have recently increased the dimensions of the anti-American aspect of unrest in the area.
- 3. Today in I Corps, a procession of some 20,000 persons—including about 1,000 South Viet—namese uniformed military personnel—was held between two Buddhist pagodas in Hue. Antigovernment banners were in evidence, but the march was described as orderly. There were no reports of any particular reaction to the government's recent compromise proposal during today's procession, which

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had been scheduled several days in advance. However, an antigovernment communique broadcast over the municipal radio in Hue stated that concessions promised by the central government are only "a plot to weaken the spirit of the people."

- 4. At the conclusion of a meeting of some 10,000 persons at the Buddhist Institute last night, one group attempted to organize the crowd into a demonstration and began a march to the central market place. According to the US Embassy, a group of 1,000 persons eventually reached the market area, and then gradually drifted away without any incidents of violence. Police were deployed nearby, but did not attempt to interfere. The city of Da Nang was reported quiet today.
- 5. In a nationwide radiobroadcast about two hours earlier, Premier Ky had stated that current unrest was due to an unfortunate misunderstanding, and went on to explain that there was no real difference between the aspirations of the military leaders and the people. Ky declared that the military government hoped to establish democratic structures, but that it needed time. This period of time would be shortened if the people remained calm and united.
- 6. Elsewhere on the government side, the US Embassy reports that military leaders are sounding out various political and religious groups on the proposed constitutional preparatory committee, although the creation of this body has not yet been formally announced. The plan was discussed informally last week with provincial council chairmen, who voiced general approval. The government is also confident of obtaining support from Catholics, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai representatives. However, press accounts of a statement issued yesterday by militant Catholic leader Father Hoang Quynh suggest that the plan may not be entirely acceptable to him.
- 7. Most important, however, are the attitudes of various Buddhist leaders towards the compromise plan. Thus far, the government has approached militant Tri Quang with the proposal, but has little

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hope of obtaining his approval. Government leaders believe that they are making some progress with the more moderate Tam Chau, chairman of the Buddhist Institute. This morning a statement broadcast in both Saigon and Hue by Tam Chau urged Buddhists "to remain calm and await the materialization of the government's promise." Shortly thereafter, the statement became the object of controversy at a meeting of some 400-500 youths at Buddhist student headquarters in Saigon. According to the US Embassy, a stormy session developed when the group split into two factions, one of which defended the statement while the other urged that students should demonstrate in opposition to the government. The more moderate faction apparently prevailed at the meeting, although the militant Buddhist students will probably attempt to inspire further public demonstrations in the capital. Although moderate and helpful in tone, the statement will not necessarily lead to a rapid subsiding of the agitation, especially in I Corps. Tam Chau also noted in the statement that official Buddhist Institute communiques never called for a Buddhist struggle movement in the first place.

In a current assessment of some of the more significant aspects of the current confrontation, the US Embassy has reported that the government has thus far been successful in limiting serious agitation in Saigon, and that the influence of Tam Chau has been helpful. The unity of the ruling military Directorate appears to be holding, although there are signs of severe strains in the cabinet, with some members apparently attempting to maintain a neutral position. The embassy feels that a consensus among major religious and political elements based on the government's plan for the transition to civilian government would go a long way toward restoring harmony at the national political level. and would also undercut the main demands of the more militant agitators in central Vietnam. ever, the problem of restoring governmental authority in I Corps would still remain. Embassy officials report that the government will apparently maintain

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its "wait and see" policy towards the unrest there, for a little while longer. If this condition continues much longer, however, the embassy feels that it will be even more difficult to bring the situation back to normal.

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# III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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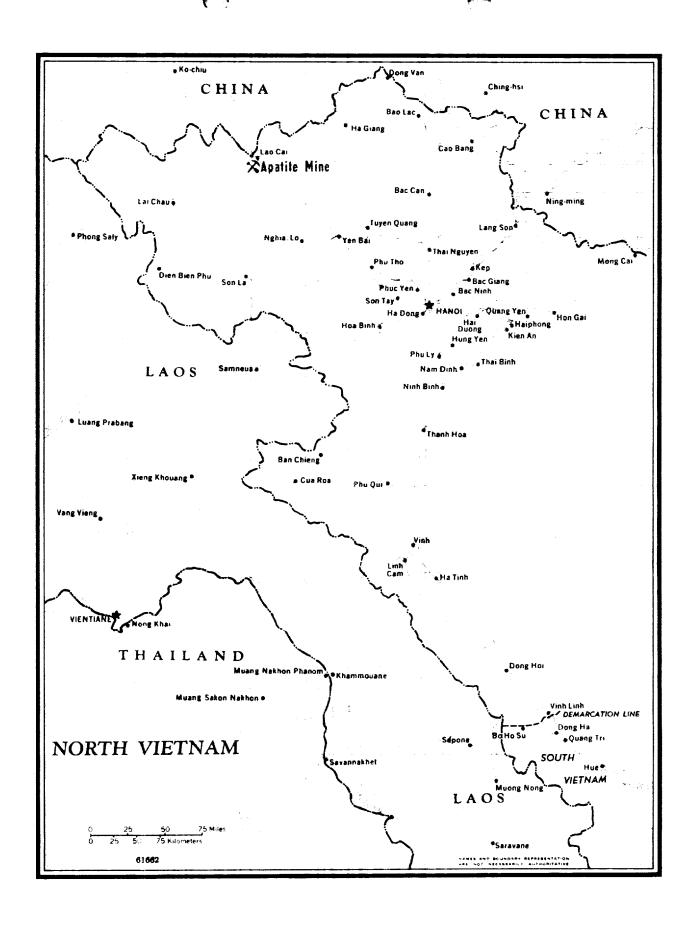
#### V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Hanoi belatedly announced on 26 March that a high-level delegation headed by party First Secretary Le Duan had left for Moscow to attend the 23rd CPSU Congress. Hanoi had earlier reported that the Le Duan delegation had gone to Peking, but did not then mention that it was going on to Moscow. Peking itself has not reported that the Vietnamese were participating in the Soviet party congress, which the Chinese are boycotting.

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## VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. North Vietnam apparently is preparing to resume exports of apatite—a phosphate—bearing rock—for the first time since the Hanoi — Lao Cai rail—road was interdicted by bombing last July.
2. These export plans suggest not only that air strikes against the Lao Cai railroad early in March did not cause serious damage but also that there is no severe shortage of rail cars in North Vietnam. Poststrike photography indicated damage to several bridges, several cuts in the line, and a landslide along about 1,000 feet of track. Apparently repair work has been or will soon be completed. The temporary nature of the repair work, however, probably will limit the capacity of the railroad.

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